

Open Letter to Constituents

Since being elected in 2009 and continuing up until the present, I have worked in support of our public safety institutions, fighting to ensure we were competitive in the marketplace with respect to wages, hours, and working conditions. The recent dispute over my position on the city employee pay increase and whether or not we should continue our policy of allowing workers to sell back unused sick leave has caused an unfortunate and unproductive rift between me and members of the police force.

Let me say categorically that I respect the work of our police and fire employees and will continue to support their efforts as I have in the past. The current dispute is the result of push-back I have received from leadership of the Tucson Police Officers Association (TPOA) over my attempts to find a solution to our current budget deficit. It does not reflect any change in my support of public safety employees and the work they do in the community.

My record speaks for itself:

In 2009, immediately following the election, I was involved in brokering an arrangement by which we established a budgetary floor for police and fire and took them out of the mix for the remainder of the budget cutting discussions.

In each of the following 3 fiscal years' budget talks, I have reaffirmed the need to fund public safety as a core service to the maximum ability we were able, given the deficits we faced in each budget year.

During the spring and summer of 2011, I fought City Administration to establish new management and software infrastructure in the 911 Dispatch Center. It was also by my initiative that those workers were given particular consideration for wage increases on the heels of the changes at the Center.

On multiple occasions I have advocated for increased support of police and fire pay/benefits and equipment and have identified reductions in our subsidy of transit as a funding source to achieve that goal.

And I have voted in opposition to budget packages when I felt they unfairly targeted public safety employees, without making adjustments in other areas first.

That is a record of support, not division with regard to public safety workers.

Last fall our City Manager and Finance Department indicated that the City was facing a deficit projected to be in the range of \$40M - \$50M. In the face of that, we were asked to support a pay increase for City workers, including police and fire. I voted against that pay increase because I believed, and continue to believe, that opposing it was the correct fiscal decision to make. We are now seeing the results of the Mayor and Council having adopted those wage increases: lay-offs, neglecting current vacancies, proposed reductions in services to the community, and the continuation of our structurally unbalanced budget. The TPOA pulled its endorsement of me as a candidate after that vote. That of course is their prerogative, but it must be noted that they stood alone among our labor council in that action. The rest understood the implications of the pay increase.

We continue to have a structurally unbalanced budget. In order to address our on-going expenditure challenges, I have proposed that we eliminate the policy by which we allow public safety workers to sell back to the City unused sick leave. In each of the past three fiscal years that policy has cost the General Fund over \$2M. We cannot afford to continue that. And taking that position is not a statement that should be taken in any fashion as reducing my support of our police and fire workers or of the work they do. Again, the TPOA leadership that has chosen to make a public issue over my policy position. That's again unfortunate, and is again being twisted by that group to suggest I no longer support our First Responders. That is simply untrue.

Setting public policy involves the balancing of priorities. At the top of the list is establishing a sound fiscal base from which all of our core services need to be funded. I do not believe the Mayor and Council made

the correct decision when they voted to support last year's pay increases, nor do I believe we should continue the sick leave sell back program. And neither of those policy positions can be construed to mean that I have backtracked on a solid 5 year support of our public safety workers.

The rank and file men and women who work for police and fire deserve our respect and our support. They have mine – and I have an obligation to balance that support with budget decisions that will allow us to operate the City in ways that our multiple and competing needs are funded adequately. I will continue to weigh each of my policy choices with that in mind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Kozachik', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steve Kozachik
City Council Member, Ward 6
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